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Suspect arrested in death of Eureka, Calif., priest

by Catholic News Service

Eureka, Calif. — Eureka police confirmed midday Thursday that they arrested Gary Lee Bullock of Redway, Calif., in connection with the death of Fr. Eric Freed, pastor since 2011 of St. Bernard Church and its mission church, St. Joseph.

An earlier police statement said the priest, 56, was found badly injured in the parish rectory at about 9 a.m. Wednesday. Police and a doctor arrived soon after and declared he was dead. The statement said cause of death had not been determined pending an autopsy scheduled for Saturday. "It does appear that there was blunt force trauma to the victim," the statement said.

Freed, who lived in Japan for more than 20 years, also taught in the religious studies department at Humboldt State University and was director of the campus Newman Center.

The Eureka newspaper, the *Times-Dispatch*, reported that Freed was found after he failed to show up for morning Mass on New Year's Day. Deacon Frank Weber went to look for him and found the priest's body amid signs of a struggle, the newspaper said.

The police statement said Bullock had been arrested for public intoxication on Tuesday, transferred briefly to a hospital for evaluation and ultimately booked into the Humboldt County Jail for about 12 hours before being released shortly after midnight Wednesday.

Bullock was spotted several hours later in Eureka and transferred to an emergency shelter, said the press release.

The statement said a man fitting Bullock's description was seen by a security guard that night around the church and asked to leave the property. Police said the rectory showed signs of forced entry and a violent struggle.

Freed was ordained for the diocese of Santa Rosa in 1990.

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